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ABSTRACT

The country of Botswana has made a firm commitment toward educating all of its citizens. This paper examines the nation's existing educational planning machinery to see if it is suitable for this task. Some proposals are made for strengthening the current system of planning. (DB)

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BOTSWANA EXPERIENCES AND PROSPECTS

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PLANNING FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL
Botswana Experiences and Prospects

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of Educational Development" Mexico, 26-30 March, 1990.

PLANNING FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL Botswana Experiences and Prospects¹

I. INTRODUCTION

To an educational planner, Botswana with its 1.3 million inhabitants has a number of advantages, but also a number of disadvantages. The smallness of the population makes some politicians, policy makers and educational implementors/administrators believe that they know it all. Thus decisions are often based on beliefs rather than on facts. Planners find themselves having to estimate the cost implications of decisions already made, instead of providing different scenarios which would form the basis for decisions. The use of statistics, research and other background information for decision making has certainly increased during the 1980s, but less than well informed decisions are still being made.

Planning and implementation of Education for All in a country of the size, and with the economic resources, of Botswana ought not to be a problem. Using the Botswana Government country paper on Education for All prepared for the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Consultation on EFA, this paper looks at the suitability of the existing planning machinery to handle the planning of EFA in Botswana. It also makes some proposals for strengthening the current situation.

II. EDUCATION FOR ALL IN BOTSWANA²

Kagiso, or social harmony, is the distillation of Botswana's national philosophy. Social harmony is not possible in practice without social justice which in turn needs education for all. In the sixth and current National Development Plan (Republic of Botswana 1985), there is clear

¹. The author of this paper was Senior Planning Officer in the Ministry of Education, Botswana 1981 - 1985 and is currently Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute of Development Research and Documentation, University of Botswana.

². This section is based on the Botswana Government country paper on Education for All prepared by the author of this paper for the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Consultation in November 1989.

evidence of Botswana's commitment to achieving education for all.

How far has Botswana already gone towards achieving education for all?

Firstly, and most important, there is already an Education for All programme in the form of the nine year Basic Education Programme consisting of primary cum junior secondary education. It is estimated that in 1989, approximately 90% of all school age children started the first part of this programme, i.e. the 7-year primary education cycle (Kann, Mapolelo and Nleya, 1989), although it is also clear that not all complete that cycle. According to the plan, almost all children, or at least 90% of a cohort, should, by 1997, go through the nine year basic education course.

Secondly, supplementing the nine year Basic Education Programme is the National Literacy Programme (NLP) launched in 1981. Initially the NLP was to run for six years, covering some 50 000 learners each year. However, when the National Development Plan 1985-91 was being prepared, it was clear that the NLP had not managed to eradicate illiteracy in the country and the NLP was turned into a long-term programme with permanent staff. The NLP offers literacy and numeracy skills to those who miss the formal system completely, or drop out at an early stage, but it does not yet effectively reach all its target clients.

In addition, there are sundry other forms of education available, e.g. the public information and education activities of a range of extension workers in health, agriculture, social welfare and community development. etc.

In spite of the above achievements, the Botswana Government felt it could benefit from participating in the Education for All initiative as it could inter alia:

- Help to achieve a clearly needed wider concept of education among both providers and recipients of education. Education is widely seen as solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Thus few extension workers and others involved in adult and non- formal educational activities outside the Ministry of Education see themselves as educators.

- Help to achieve greater integration and coordination of education activities conducive to achieving Education for All. The main problem is probably the departmentalisation of the learning system and thus of its various activities. Thus increasing the integration and coordination within the Botswana learning system appears to be of utmost importance. Education for All is not the concern solely of the Ministry of Education, it is a national concern that requires the involvement by all.

This is not the first time that integration and coordination have been singled out as important factors in improving the educational provision (including the extension services) in Botswana. Maybe it would help if all providers of learning opportunities realised that to a great extent their activities have a joint target audience. This is especially the case within the extension services. For example, the unmarried mother-cum-farmer in the rural areas is a potential literacy group participant; she is a potential target of the agricultural demonstrator; she is a potential patient and also part of the audience listening to the health talk; she is in need of employable skills, and, not least, she is the mother of a potential primary school pupil. However, rarely is she asked what she needs to learn or would like to learn, because we think we know. The suggested strategies therefore include involving the potential learners in defining what are their basic learning needs.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Educational planning in Botswana takes place at several levels of the government system, for example, at ministerial level, at district level and at village level. However, there are, in reality, few links between these various planning activities even though in theory there exists a system for coordination through the Rural Extension Coordinating Committee.

While planning techniques have improved tremendously during the last decade and micro-computers have allowed more complex models to be used, there is still little understanding of the educational planning that takes place at individual level. Few planners spend the time required to collect grassroot level information as input to their plans. Thus the starting point is not the learner, but the educational system. Assumptions, which do not have any

base in real life, are made regarding the expected behaviour of prospective learners. For example, when preparing the current National Development Plan it was assumed that repetition in the last standard of primary school would drop as the secondary school system expanded. This turned out not to be the case. It was also assumed that no repetition took place at junior secondary level as regulations do not allow this. Research has shown that there is substantial repetition.

Not only do planners rarely collect relevant background information, they also rarely spend any time on disseminating their plans apart from having them printed in National Development Plans. Thus during the first year of the current plan the University of Botswana admissions committee admitted students according to their wishes and took no cognisance of the manpower based projections and plans as they had not seen the plan. Admissions had to be redone.

With regard to development projects it is often possible to identify three phases i.e. design, implementation and evaluation. The importance of the interaction between these phases has been highlighted frequently. A similar model if applied to educational planning would help planners not only to understand the present situation, but also to understand why plans often do not turn into reality.

It is important to remember that in the end it is not the educational planner or the administrator who makes the educational decisions. It is the learner. Action-oriented and participatory research is increasingly being used. I am arguing for action-oriented and participatory educational planning in our efforts towards achieving Education for All.

In connection with several educational research projects in Botswana a combination of conventional data collection and more unorthodox use of video-recording of interviews has allowed "inward" communication, i.e. from rural areas to central government ministries. This approach appears very appropriate in the context of involving potential learners in defining what are their basic learning needs and in planning for Education for All. (See e.g. "Re-empowering the Respondent - Collecting Data via Video for Educational Research" by Kann and Quarmbay, 1989).